

**Statement to the House Education Standing Committee Regarding HB 4369**  
**March 13, 2013**

The expansion of the Education Achievement Authority of Michigan presents both potential and challenges. Michigan PTA shares the desire to see our state's struggling schools improved. However, we have strong concerns regarding the transparency and accountability around the EAA, and the academic progress of its students.

The research is clear: schools perform better when they benefit from robust community engagement and family-school partnerships. The work of Dr. Joyce Epstein of John Hopkins University shows that a key element of that partnership is shared decision making. National PTA, in coordination with Dr. Epstein, created the National Standards for Family-School Partnerships. The Michigan PTA supports and encourages our units and members to use these standards in their local buildings. The important factor from these standards is that families should be full partners in decisions that affect their children. Research shows that parental and family engagement directly impacts student achievement.

While we have many broad concerns with House Bill 4369, the following are a few of our specific concerns.

HB 4369 allows the Chancellor the opportunity to establish a School Reinvention and Transformation Team that will include representation of parents or guardians of students in attendance, other residents of the school district, as well as teachers, principals, or other officers or employees of the Achievement Authority. We urge you to make this option, mandatory. We also insist that parents are included on the team that develops the School Redesign Plan. We need all stakeholders at the table to assure that our children receive the best education possible. One of the criteria for being released from the Achievement Authority is parental support and involvement. How can parental support and involvement be reviewed, when parents have not been provided a meaningful opportunity to be involved?

In Michigan, part of the way we accomplish shared decision making is through the local election of school boards. Local control of our schools shows parents that their voices matter in the education of their children and provides for more direct accountability. Under this Act, that accountability disappears. HB 4369 authorizes a seven member authority board; five members appointed by the governor with the advice and consent of the State Senate; and two additional members appointed by the governor, one each from lists of three nominees submitted by the Senate Majority Leader, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives. What qualifies these representatives to make these decisions? Why isn't the State Superintendent or State Board of Education being included in this process? How are the voices of parents and community heard through this process?

HB 4369 places the EAA outside of local control and outside the control of the State Board of Education and the State Superintendent. How are we to achieve shared decision making and meaningful partnerships in the education of our children if we have no voice in selecting school

leadership and no mechanism by which to hold school leaders accountable? Is the Governor's office going to begin fielding all parent concerns regarding the EAA? Who's listening to families and communities and ensuring they play a role in their children's education?

HB 4369 allows the EAA to establish nonprofit corporations to achieve its goals. Non-profits are not subject to the Open Meetings Act. That provision suggests that legislators who support this bill do not want parents to be involved in the education process at all. Decisions about our children's education should not be made behind closed doors.

HB 4369 also makes providing medical, optical, and dental benefits to the EAA's employees and their dependents optional. This bill also disallows employees who were previously employed by a school district and are now hired in a reform district to earn credits under Michigan Public School Employees' Retirement System (MPERS). If Michigan is to attract high-quality educators, we have to make a commitment to providing them with benefits for themselves and their families. We want the best and brightest teaching Michigan's children, and they won't be if they don't have the assurance of adequate benefits. Would you take a job if you knew the benefits you need to provide for your family were optional? Michigan PTA and the citizens of Michigan value our teachers more than that, and you should too.

HB 4369 allows the Achievement Authority to organize charter schools in school districts where an emergency manager has been appointed or within the same school district and within a two mile radius of a public school that has been ordered to be placed under the Achievement Authority. The Achievement Authority's purpose is to improve student achievement in the lowest performing schools in the state. HB 4369 allows schools to be released from the Achievement Authority when students are achieving and other criterion is met. If the Achievement Authority is designed to be a non-permanent structure within communities, why are they allowed to make a permanent decision of organizing charter schools?

School reform is essential – nobody disagrees with that. We have to improve teaching methods, we have to take advantage of technology, and we have to find better ways to differentiate instruction for children of all learning styles and paces. But do the reforms in HB 4369 help children learn? Do they help teachers teach? Do they help parents support their child's education? Why are we talking about expanding and codifying into law an experimental education system which hasn't even had time to prove itself effective?

We need our legislators to make a commitment to public education and to instituting reforms that will provide transparency, accountability, and real academic progress for every student. House bill 4369 as written does not provide transparency, accountability or proven academic progress. This measure stifles transparency, removes accountability, and allows more children to become guinea pigs for untested reforms. Parents, families and the community must be engaged in this process of turning around our lowest performing schools.